

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMCONSUL MILAN

TO AMEMBASSY ROME

SECSTATE WASHDC 4379

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 MILAN 2128

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TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PINR, PGOV, IT

SUBJECT: CABLE FROM BERGAMO

1. BERGAMO IS CATHOLIC TO THE CORE. BUT BERGAMO'S CATHOLICS HAVE HAD IT WITH ROME. THEY HAVE HAD IT BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THAT THE NATIONAL CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP IS DRIVING ITALY INTO THE HANDS OF THE COMMUNISTS. YET, WHILE THEIR RATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION LEADS BERGAMO LEADERS INEVITABLY TO THIS CONCLUSION, SOME HAVE A MYSTIC CONFIDENCE THAT, IN THE END, ITALIAN VOTERS WILL PULL BACK FROM THE FINAL PLUNGE IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. THAT IS THE MAIN CONCLUSION FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH MORE THAN A DOZEN BERGAMO OFFICIALS AND LEADERS ON NOVEMBER 3 AND 12.

2. HARDLY AN HOUR FROM MILAN, BERGAMO IS A TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC STRONGHOLD. IT ALONE CONTROLS 206 OF THE 250 TOWN COUNCILS IN THE PROVINCE. WITH 48 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN JUNE LOCAL ELECTIONS, THE DC GAINED HALF A PERCENTAGE POINT IN THE CITY OF 125,000 ALTHOUGH IT LOST 3.5 POINTS IN THE PROVINCE DROPPING TO 55.3 PERCENT. THE COMMUNISTS JUMPED FROM ALMOST 20 PERCENT TO ALMOST 27.5 PERCENT AND THE SOCIALISTS FROM NEARLY 11 TO NEARLY 14. THE GREAT LOSERS, AS ELSEWHERE, WERE THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND LIBERALS WHO HAVE NOW ALMOST VANISHED IN BERGAMO AS ORGANIZED PARTIES.

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3. THIS SITUATION BRINGS LITTLE JOY TO BERGAMO CATHOLICS. THEY FORESEE NATIONAL LOSSES IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS THAT WILL BRING THE COMMUNISTS TO POWER. NOT BECAUSE OF THEIR LOCAL SHORTCOMINGS. BUT BECAUSE OF THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THEIR PARTY. IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO OVERSTATE THE ANGER AND FRUSTRATION VOICED UNANIMOUSLY BY LOCAL DC LEADERS AT ROME AND THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP. THESE MIDDLE-AGED MEN FEEL THAT THE ITALIAN DEMOCRACY FOR WHICH SOME LABORED IN THE RESISTANCE AND ALL WORKED DURING THE POST-WAR PERIOD, IS IN DANGER OF BEING SWEEPED AWAY. NOT BY COMMUNIST VIOLENCE. BUT BY CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC DEFAULT SECONDED BY SOCIALIST MUDDLING.

4. THE BISHOP, A POWERFULLY BUILT AND INCISIVE SEPTUAGENARIAN, WAS AS BLUNT AS THE REST. THE DC PARTY, HE SAID, WAS DEAD. THERE WAS NO ORGANIZATION, NO LEADERSHIP. THE LOCAL LEADERS WERE INDIVIDUALLY HONEST, DECENT AND ABLE. BUT THERE WAS NO GUIDANCE OR LEADERSHIP FROM ABOVE. IN FACT, ONCE ELECTED, MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WERE NEVER SEEN IN BERGAMO AGAIN. THEY KNEW NOTHING ABOUT LOCAL ATTITUDES AND DIDN'T WANT TO LEARN.

5. THE DC MAYOR, AND IMPRESSIVE MAN IN HIS EARLY 50'S, AND HIS CITY COUNCIL COLLEAGUES, HAD NO KINDER WORDS. ROME WAS DEAF TO THE GRASS ROOTS. IT HEARD NOTHING AND UNDERSTOOD NOTHING ABOUT THE LOCAL SITUATION. OUR SKIRTS ARE CLEAN AND OUR STREETS ARE CLEAN, HE ARGUED, BUT WE ARE BEING DEFEATED BY THE COMMUNISTS BECAUSE OF THE OLD FACES, THE CORRUPTION, THE DONOTHING LEADERSHIP IN ROME. WE HAVE HAD ENOUGH. THEY HAVE GOT TO KNOW IN ROME THAT IT'S ALL OVER. AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, WE'VE HAD IT.

6. AT THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL, THE ATTITUDE WAS THE SAME. THE WHOLE TOP OF THE DC PYRAMID MUST GO - THE WHOLE LOT - FANFANI, MORO, RUMOR, ANDREOTTI, COLOMBO, TAVIANI, PICCOLI, BISAGLIA. IT WAS USELESS TO TRY TO GO ON WITH A GENERATION OF LEADERS DISCREDITED IN THE EYES OF THE PUBLIC WHO HAD PLAYED MUSICAL CHAIRS FOR 30 YEARS. NO DEMOCRACY ANYWHERE ELSE WAS STILL RUN BY THE LEADERS OF THE FORTIES. THESE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DC LEADERS WERE IN THEIR FIFTIES.

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THEY WERE NOT ASKING JOBS FOR THEMSELVES. THEY WANTED YOUNGER MEN THAN THEMSELVES GIVEN A CHANCE NOW - NOT SOONER OR LATER. SOONER OR LATER WOULD BE TOO LATE. TO THEIR IMMENSE FRUSTRATION, ROME WAS IMPERVIOUS TO THEIR PLEAS. MAYBE THEY WERE MAKING SOME PROGRESS. BUT IT WAS TOO LITTLE AND TOO SLOW.

7. THE DC CITY AND REGIONAL SECRETARY DROVE HOME THE

SAME THEME. BUT HE ADDED HIS STRONG
OPPOSITION TO A CATHOLIC-COMMUNIST DEAL IN THE COMPROMESSO
STORICO. THAT, HE WARNED, MIGHT SUIT THE CHURCH AND
SOME LEFT WING CATHOLICS. BUT IT WOULD BE AT THE EXPENSE
OF ITALIAN LAY DEMOCRACY WHICH WAS THE ITALY THAT THE
BERGAMO CATHOLICS WERE DEFENDING.

8. WHILE THE BISHOP DESCRIBED COMUNIONE AND LIBERAZIONE
AS THE ONE BRIGHT LIGHT, PARTY LEADERS SAW IT MORE DIMLY.
THEY WERE GLAD ENOUGH TO HAVE MORE DOOR BELL RINGERS.
THEY WERE A GOOD DEAL LESS GLAD TO SEE A NEW CATHOLIC
PRESSURE GROUP THAT LOOKED LIKE A CLERICAL PHOENIX.

9. NO ONE HAD A KIND WORD FOR THE SOCIALISTS - BUT NEITHER
COULD I FIND A SOCIALIST TO SEE WHO MIGHT HAVE SAID ONE
FOR HIMSELF. WHILE ALL DEPLORED THE SOCIALIST GAME OF
OSCILLATING BETWEEN COMMUNIST AND CATHOLIC, OPPOSITION
AND GOVERNMENT, MOST FELT THE SOCIALISTS WERE THE LYNCH PIN
OF THE FUTURE. THE REGIONAL SECRETARY WAS EXPLICIT. THE
SOCIALISTS HAD HURT THE DC GREATLY. BUT THEIR ATTACKS
WERE NOT WHOLLY UNJUSTIFIED. THE DC NEVER WANTED TO SHARE
REAL POWER WITH THEM NATIONALLY. NOW THEY HAD TO BE WON
BACK BY MAJOR CABINET POSTS TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE AGAINST
THE COMMUNISTS. AFTER THE ELECTIONS, IT WOULD BE THE
SOCIALISTS WHO WOULD DECIDE WHETHER ITALY WOULD BE
RULED BY THEMSELVES AND THE COMMUNISTS OR THEMSELVES AND
THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS.

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FM AMCONSUL MILAN

TO AMEMBASSY ROME

SECSTATE WASHDC 4380

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10. WITH SEVERAL NOTABLE EXCEPTIONS, ALL AGREED THAT THE LOCAL ECONOMIC SITUATION WAS BAD AND GETTING WORSE. THE EXCEPTIONS WERE THE PREFECT WHO SAW SIGNS OF UP-TURN, THE BISHOP WHO HAD A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF THE SITUATION AND THOUGHT THINGS WERE PRETTY FAIR, A CHEMICAL MANUFACTURER WHO SAID THE LOCAL CHEMICAL INDUSTRY WAS RUNNING WELL AHEAD OF LAST YEAR, AND THE UIL REGIONAL SECRETARY. THAT A TRADE UNIONIST SHOULD SAY THE WORST HAD PASSED, THAT UNEMPLOYMENT WAS DECLINING AND THAT THE RANK AND FILE OF ALL THE LOCAL UNIONS WAS UP IN ARMS AGAINST FURTHER STRIKES IS A NOTEWORTHY IF NOT ENTIRELY EXPLICABLE EVENT. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT THE LOCAL ECONOMIC SITUATION WAS DAMPENED BY POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY WHICH LED OWNERS TO HOLD BACK ON INVESTMENT BECAUSE OF FEAR ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF A COMMUNIST SUCCESS IN 1977.

11. A RECURRING THEME WAS THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITED STATES SUPPORT. THE SECRETARY'S NOV. 2 STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE WAS KNOWN BY NEARLY ALL AND APPROVED. AND FROM THE BISHOP TO THE TRADE UNION SECRETARY (A REPUBLICAN OR SOCIAL DEMOCRAT) THERE WAS A UNANIMOUS URGING THAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD NOT ABANDON ITALY. MOREOVER, THERE WERE ENERGETIC RECOMMENDATIONS THAT THE UNITED STATES SPARE NEITHER TIME NOR PERSUASION TO FORCE A CHANGE IN THE UNCLASSIFIED

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NATIONAL DC LEADERSHIP. IT WAS, OF COURSE, PRIMARILY AN ITALIAN PROBLEM AND PRIMARILY AN ITALIAN RESPONSIBILITY. BUT A COMMUNIST ITALY WOULD NOT ONLY BE A DISASTER FOR ITALIANS. IT WOULD BE A DISASTER FOR WESTERN EUROPE AND FOR THE UNITED STATES AS WELL. FOR THAT REASON, SEVERAL ARGUED, THE UNITED STATES SHOULD FORGET THE NICETIES WHILE THERE WAS STILL TIME. THE COMMUNISTS WEREN'T PLAYING GAMES. THEY WERE PLAYING FOR KEEPS.

12. DESPITE THE LOGIC OF THEIR OWN ANALYSES, HOWEVER, THERE WAS A STRANGE SECOND CONCLUSION BY SEVERAL. THE BISHOP, THE TRADE UNIONIST, AND THE PREFECT, ALL CONCLUDED THAT DESPITE THE EVIDENCE THEY SAW, THE VOTER WOULD NOT VOTE FOR THE COMMUNISTS IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AS THEY HAD ON JUNE 15. IT WAS A MATTER OF FAITH IN ITALIAN GOOD SENSE. BUT THAT WASN'T AN EXCUSE FOR LYING DOWN. IT WAS RATHER AN ENCOURAGEMENT THAT DESPITE THE ODDS, IT WAS STILL WORTH FIGHTING.

13. ALL OF WHICH SEEMS TO MEAN THAT THE BERGAMASCHI ARE NOT RESIGNED TO THE INEVITABILITY OF A COMMUNIST SUCCESS IN THE PARLIA-

MENTARY ELECTIONS AND ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT A RIGHIST SOLUTION.
BUT OUR GREY HAIREDCATHOLIC CONTACTS ARE PROFOUNDLY OUT OF
SYMPATHY WITH THEIR NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND OBVIOUSLY INCREAS-
INGLY FRUSTRATED BY THEIR PNABILITY TO INFLUENCE NATIONAL
DECISIONS.FINA

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